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FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2958
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 001492

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2019
TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: WU CHIH-YANG POSSIBLE KMT UP AND COMER

REF: TAIPEI 1368

Classified By: Political Chief Dave Rank. Reasons: 1.4 b/d

1. (C) Summary. Among the winners in the Dec. 5 local elections for city mayors and county magistrates, Wu Chih-yang is garnering particular attention as an up-and-comer in the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party. The scion of KMT royalty, Wu is the third generation of his family to be elected magistrate of populous Taoyuan County. At 40 years, Wu is one of only a handful of charismatic young leaders to emerge in a party top-heavy with long-entrenched politicians. His rapid rise is due in part to the support of his father, former KMT chairman and longtime party heavyweight Wu Po-hsiung. In that sense, Wu Chih-yang's political fortunes mirror those of another KMT leader, Taipei Mayor Hau Long-bin, whose father served as premier and party vice chairman. End Summary.

Born to be a Politician

2. (C) From the very start, Wu Chih-yang was groomed by his father, Wu Po-hsiung, to take over the family's political legacy. The elder Wu pushed his son to prepare for public office by studying law and used his political capital to advance his son's career. After completing legal degrees at Taiwan National University and Harvard, Wu Chih-yang was elected to the Legislative Yuan (LY) in 2004 and reelected four years later. Wu decided to follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and run for Taoyuan County Magistrate, a launching pad to higher office for former Vice-President Annette Lu and Vice-Premier Eric Chu, a popular KMT politician who is seen by many as the heir-apparent to President Ma Ying-jeou. According to both Chu and Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng, Wu Po-hsiung agreed to yield the KMT chairmanship to President Ma earlier this year in exchange for party support of his son's bid in Taoyuan. The younger Wu subsequently was nominated as the KMT candidate over a 40-year party veteran.

Strengths & Weaknesses

3. (C) In addition to his pedigree, Wu's academic background combined with a youthful and clean image appealed to voters, according to Taoyuan County KMT Secretary General Liu Jiu-nan. While opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidates were widely viewed as being far more effective than the KMT in using the Internet in the local elections, Wu maintained a blog and a Facebook page to reach out to web-savvy voters. Wu also has built on his father's strong standing in the politically significant Hakka community (reftel), which accounts for a sizable proportion of voters in Taoyuan, Hsinchu and several other counties. Still, his future political success is by no means guaranteed. His younger brother, Wu Chih-kang, said easy

success and rigid legal training made Wu Chih-yang proud, stand-offish and inflexible. Political analysts also have pointed out that Wu's margin of victory in Taoyuan was smaller than expected in a traditionally KMT-dominated district.

The Next Generation

¶4. (C) When the DPP Secretary General resigned on December 8, one reason he cited for his decision was to make way for the party's next generation. While many in the KMT also realize the importance of grooming a new generation, the only truly prominent fortysomething KMT politician is Vice Premier Chu. If Wu chih-yang proves a popular magistrate in Taoyuan, he could soon join the exclusive club of young KMT politicians to watch in the coming decades.
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